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ABSTRACT

The five W's, Why, What, Where, Who, and When, can be useful in teaching mass communication and mass media in the secondary school as well as in the college and university. The great amount of mass communication and mass media in the lives of students makes such instruction relevant to their lives and to society. Students should be taught the characteristics, potentialities, and limitations of mass media as a process and as an institution. Courses should be taught on the secondary as well as on the college level. Usually the speech or English teacher would teach courses in mass communication or mass media, but any teacher who has the interest and know-how should be allowed to teach such courses. The best time to teach courses in mass communication and mass media is now. (SW)

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THE FIVE W's OF TEACHING MASS COMMUNICATION IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL*

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The title I have chosen to give my contribution to this panel is "The 5 W's of Teaching Mass Communication in the Secondary School." As you will shortly realize, that title is in many ways the very antithesis of the position I plan to take in my remarks.

Those with even a nodding acquaintance with the practice and teaching of journalism know that the "5 W's"--plus an "H"--refer to the so-called essential elements of a good news story: WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHEN, WHERE and HOW. I intend to use that series of elements--minus the "H" or HOW--to organize my comments concerning the teaching of mass communication and the mass media in the secondary school; and, for that matter, in the college and university. Leaving the "H" or HOW to others on this panel, I'll focus attention on the five W's--and, most particularly, on the two W's of WHAT and WHY.

First, the element of WHY. Why is there a real need for instruction in mass communication and the mass media in the secondary school? I believe there are several factors which justify offering, in some organized fashion, such courses and instruction in the curriculum of the secondary school. First, the very omnipresence of mass communication and the mass media in the lives of our students makes such instruction relevant to the contemporary student, and to society as a whole. Simply put, mass communication and the

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mass media must be taught because the subject is relevant to our students' lives. The media of mass communication contribute to--and have great impact upon--the lives of high school students, their parents, their friends and their teachers. Mass communication and the mass media are a powerful, omnipresent part of life--occupying students' time and interests, diverting them and developing them, exposing them to society's problems and accomplishments, and offering them both an education and an escape. Mass communication, first and foremost, is communication--powerful, sometimes overt, sometimes insidious, often controversial, and always present. As such, the study of mass communication, and the media of mass communication,is both an appropriate and a necessary subject for the classroom.

We need to teach the mass media because they are such powerful and pervasive agents of socialization and education--and because they are such constant companions in our students' lives and in ours. The media, by their very power, impact and omnipresence, demand that their roles be understood and questioned, analyzed and criticized.

A second justification for including the study of mass communication and the mass media in the secondary school curriculum is that, through such study, our students can come to grips with many of the social issues in their lives--issues which are both explicity and implicity treated in mass media content as the media fulfill their roles of public enlightenment, education and entertainment. Study of the organization, structure and functioning of the mass media themselves is appropriate in that many of the same social problems and social issues facing our communities and nation are present in the many questions and problems confronting the media. Thus, a note of urgency--as well as notes of social, moral and ethical importance--is injected into the need to systematically study mass communication and the mass media.

Questions raised, for example, about the effects of mass media content upon the lives of our students--and the lives of others--are not merely sterile academic questions. The effects of the media upon juvenile delinquency; on attitudes toward violence, aggression, war and sexuality; on political opinions and institutions; on changing concepts of morality and human and civil rights; and upon peoples' relationships with one another--all are matters of legitimate concern in the high school (and college) classroom. That the mass media are perhaps our students' major source of information and ideas in such matters makes the study, understanding and questioning of mass media content and practice an essential component of our students' educational experience.

Similar issues and questions can be--and should be--raised and examined concerning the effects of the structure, organization and operation of the media industries upon the lives, thinking and attitudes of our students and society.

Accompanying this sense of relevance and urgency, of course, must be the inculcated realization and understanding that there are no pat and easy answers to be found to the social, moral and ethical issues and questions raised in and by the mass media. With this understanding, the study of mass communication and the effects of the mass media provides a vehicle for students' examination of the pressing social concerns of our time.

A third reason for studying the mass media in the secondary school may be found in the transactional nature of the mass communication process itself. The same mass media that influence our students may in their turn <u>be</u> influenced <u>by</u> our students in their present and future roles as media users and consumers, as respondents to and critics of the mass media. Just as the mass media, by their structure and their content, may make the students what they are--so

too do our students have a responsibility and the opportunity to make the media what they are; or what they want the media to be; or what they need the media to be. Our students need to be made aware of their obligations and responsibilities to the institution of mass communication. Even more importantly, they need to understand their opportunities and the mechanisms available to them to make known to the media industries their concerns, appreciations and desires.

In short, the study of mass communication and the mass media can lead the student/citizen to appreciate and understand his and her obligations--and the avenues open to them--to make the mass media meet their obligations and potentials. The mass media, if they are to truly and responsibly operate in "the public interest" and "service the needs of their audiences," must hear for enlightened media consumers. Mass media instruction in the school can help to create just such "enlightened consumers;" we can develop in our students the desire to "speak" to the media and the will to work for the media's improvement and change, when and where needed.

The second of the journalist's five W's is the element of WHAT. What can and should be taught our students in courses and units on mass communication and the mass media in the high school? My previous remarks have undoubtedly provided some indication of the tenor of my response to this question. As suggested earlier, the title of my presentation is somewhat the antithesis of what I believe should be taught at the secondary (and college) level. Quite frankly, a concern with and attention to the five W's in journalism education portends, in my mind, an unwarranted stress upon the art and craft--the mechanical and production aspects--of journalism. In similar fashion (and I refer you here to the Michigan Speech Association's Curriculum Guide for Radio, Television and Film, as an example), courses designed to acquaint the

student with the facilities, equipment and materials of broadcasting and film; or to enhance students' understanding of the operation and use of such equipment through broadcast or film experience; place an unrealistic emphasis on the production aspects of mass media and mass media education.

Such a "hardware" emphasis carries the implicit assumption that all or most of the students in our mass media classes aspire to production careers in the media. How many of our students are even contemplating careers in the mass media? I daresay very few of them. And considering the currently very limited number of job openings--both of a production nature and otherwise--in the mass media industries, there may even be some aura of dishonesty in such a "hardware" orientation in mass media education.

One of the real weaknesses, then, of current mass communication and mass media education in the secondary schools (and, in greater or lesser degree, in the colleges and universities) is the emphasis on the mechanical skills and production aspects of the mass media--and a collateral slighting of the institutional and societal aspects of mass communication. Too much stress is placed upon the student as the potential producer of mass media messages; and too little emphasis is given to the students' and society's role as recipient, consumer and respondent to such messages.

What, then, can and should be taught in mass communication and mass media courses and units? What content areas can and should the teacher and student of the mass media address themselves to? The following are some of the things, often stated in the form of questions, which I consider to be important.

What is mass communication? The student should be taught the characteristics, potentialities and limitations of mass communication, both as a process and as an institution. What, for example, are the components, aims

and functions of mass communication? How are the different media of mass communication similar and in what ways do they differ? How is mass communication different from and how is it similar to more direct personal, interpersonal and group communication processes and systems? What does mass communication attempt to do and why; what are the functions and effects of mass communication and the mass media? Separating process from technology, what is the difference between mass communication and the mass media?

How are the mass media structured, operated and controlled? The mass media as we now know them did not just happen--they have a long history of development into the institutions and organizations that they are today. A study of the history and evolution of mass communication and the individual mass media can illuminate the choices that were confronted and made in that evolution. Such a study might, for instance, demonstrate the choice-points at which both the media's and the audience's attitudes toward the media's public and social responsibilities, their service roles and their dysfunctions were formed and articulated.

The structural and organizational characteristics of the media industries should be identified--how they got to be the way they are is often a study in "might-have-beens" and "roads-not-taken." These characteristics are the result of choices and decisions--some economically dictated, some the consequence of legislation, some made by the media themselves, and many made by society and invoked upon the media. The student of mass media should learn how and why those choices and decisions came about; and come to understand the contemporary consequences of those decisions and choices.

Teaching something of the physical nature of the media is also useful. This is not, however, to introduce and dwell upon the workings and operation of the printing press, the motion picture camera or the D.J.'s turntable;

but, rather, to understand how the physical attributes of the media have resulted in such almost inevitable developments as within and cross-media monpolies, media conflict and competition, and restricted access to the instruments of mass communication--as well as in the need for and demands for governmental, industry and/or public control and regulation of the media.

How do the mass media influence their audiences? Is it possible to imagine any aspect of our students' lives which is not today touched by mass communication and the mass media? Reading, sleeping, working and leisure time activity; attitudes toward themselves, neighbors, government, schools, churches and businesses--all have been and will continue to be affected in some manner by their exposure to and use of the mass media. The mass media have been alternately credited and blamed for spurring the economy, undermining public tastes, spreading culture, promoting political apathy, enlightening the electorate, contributing to societal violence and crime, glorifying sexuality--all of these things, and many more.

The task of the mass media teacher is to teach the student to ask intelligent and searching questions about what the mass media are doing; questions, for example, about the content of the media, about the effects of media content and treatment, and about what the media might well be doing and providing to their audiences. To the extent that our students need and want an improved media product, our media courses and units of instruction should be directed to developing more discriminating and demanding audiences for such improved content. To the extent that our students are satisfied with, or are willing to accept, currently proffered mass media fare, we should be instilling in them an understanding and appreciation of that contentment and acceptance.

We should be directing our students' attention to the consequences of the mass media product for the individual and society, and asking a number of questions. What, for example, has been the mass media's impact upon our political system; upon our economic system? What have been the effects of the media and media content upon the rising expectations of minority and dissident groups in our society? How well do the mass media industries, at the national as well as at the local community level, reflect the thinking and interests of their readers and viewers? What values are presented in media content and advertising? How are groups of people characterized, occupations presented and ideas represented? And perhaps the most ambitious of questions: To what extent are our students, as media consumers, products of their mass media environments?

There is, of course, a reverse question: How do our students, as media consumers and critics, influence the media? As recipients, beneficiaries and occasional victims of the mass media and their diverse products, what means do they have available to them to tell the media if and when they are doing their job effectively and properly--or ineffectually and improperly? How can our students instruct and influence the media when they feel the media must redirect their efforts? If unsatisfied with the performance of the media, what recourse do our students have as consumers and citizens? How much responsibility, and what kinds of responsibility, does a mass media audience have to express itself to mass communicators?

As media teachers, our role in this regard should be to encourage our students to recognize that the mass communication institution can be changed if and when they don't like what it is doing; that the mass media can and should be encouraged and rewarded--not by apathy and passive acceptance of the media's performance, but by active participation and feedback--when they

do like what the media are doing to and for them. The mass media teacher's goal should be one of developing and encouraging students to become involved as informed recipients and active participants in the mass communication process. Participation in the feedback process should be presented as more than a right or a privilege; but rather as an obligation. It is a right--but a meaningless one unless intelligently and actively exercised.

I don't mean to completely deprecate and downgrade the place of organized instruction and experience in the mechanics and production skills of journalism, radio, TV and film at the high school level. There definitely is room for media workshops and production experiences; there is a place for such activities as the closed-circuit TV station, the school newspapers, and the high school FM radio station. I do contend, however, that such instruction and experience, focusing on the HOW of the mass media--on the mechanics and technical aspects of mass media production--should not be viewed, as it so often is, as an end in and of itself.

Mass media production represents the glamorous side of the business of mass communication to most young people. They are anxious to lay hands on the equipment and develop their production skills. We must and can use this enthusiasm to provide the best mass communication instruction possible, but we should not allow our students' enthusiasm and attitudes to deter us from the far more important and useful considerations I have already outlined and discussed. If our students are to fully understand the process and nature of mass communication; reach their full potential as citizen-users of the mass media; and--if that is their thing--become articulate, intelligent and effective initiators and producers of mass media messages, instruction geared to mass media production must be subordinated to that in the nature and function of mass communication; the history and development of mass communication;

and the structure, audiences and impact of the mass communication institution.

Three of the traditional journalist's five W's remain to be dealt with; those of WHERE, WHO and WHEN. I will address myself only briefly to each of them.

WHERE should courses and units in mass communication or the mass media such as I have outlined be offered? Where should they appear in the secondary school curriculum? The answer is fairly obvious. Recognizing that the purpose of such instruction is to provide our students with a critical understanding and appreciation of mass communication and the media as a powerful and pervasive force, and to make them aware of the media's roles and effects in society, it seems only appropriate that such courses be taught at the secondary school level and not be limited, as is largely the case at present, to the colleges and universities. If (as I believe) one of the objectives of the educational institution, at all of its levels, is that of helping students to come to grips with and understand the many forces and institutions which are shaping their lives and their society, it seems not only logical but also mandatory that the high school student should come face-to-face with the most powerful, pervasive and persuasive socialization and educational force of all--the institution and media of mass communication. In fact, I don't see that that confrontation can be avoided.

This leads directly into the question of WHO. Here the crucial question would seem to be: Who might best be expected to teach a unit or course in mass communication at the secondary school level? My answer to that question requires a momentary departure from my earlier remarks. I think that it is unfortunate, and even dysfunctional, that the field of communication education has been artificially fractured into two or more camps. At the college level,

written communication is traditionally taught in the Department of English; spoken or oral communication in a Department of Speech or Speech Communication. In our secondary schools, the speech unit or course normally can't be taught by just any English teacher; he or she must or should have certification in Speech (I have no quarrel with certification; only with the bifurcation of the communication system). With the exception of the largest, most affluent and progressive school systems, it's a rare occasion in which a teacher is hired <u>just to teach speech</u> communication.

With particular regard to mass communication and mass media instruction, at both the college and high school levels, the print media courses--those involving written mass communication--seem to be the special province of the English teacher; while the broadcast and film media courses--those in the spoken and graphic mass media arts--are the peculiar domain of the Speech teacher. The question presents itself: How are the principles of effective communication and persuasion any different for the two teachers? Are the social and political effects of the print media drastically different from those of the broadcast and film media? In answer to both questions, I don't believe there is any significant difference. Admittedly, the mechanics and specific production skills differ in the print and broadcast media; but both are instruments of mass communication. And contrary to the ideas of McLuhan, the effects of the mass media upon their audiences remain as much, if not more so, a function of the messages conveyed by the media than of the media themselves.

To the extent that the paramount objective of mass communication and mass media education is to instill in our students an understanding of mass communication as an omnipresent, powerful and persuasive force in society and in their lives; and to teach a critical evaluation and appreciation of

the mass media's roles, effects and functions; it follows that the responsibility for mass communication or mass media instruction is within the purview of both the Speech and the English Teacher--or better yet, the "Communication Teacher." WHO might teach a unit or a course in mass communication or the mass media? My answer is: Any, and all, of those teachers who have an interest in, are committed to, and have a desire to inculcate in their students an interest in the nature, process, structure, functioning and effects of human communication--of which mass communication is only the most organized and institutionalized form.

And the last of the five W's. For those of us who are not already doing so, WHEN might we begin to teach mass communication and the mass media--not merely as a set of mechanical skills and production techniques, but as an institutional and educational force in its own right--in the secondary schools (and colleges)? The best time to begin would appear to be NOW.